

Winner: Katherine Haaheim, Senior at Chaska High School (MN)

How Much is That Doggie In the Window, and What's His GPA



KATIE HAAHEIM is currently a senior at Chaska High School (MN) where she participates in the drama department, choir, speech team, and a wide variety of clubs. She is a twice-published poet, and is considering a major in English/education. Katie wrote this article in the fall of her senior year, while making her way through the hectic and challenging process of writing essays, filling out applications and narrowing down her college list.

In my extensive, laborious experience applying to and searching out colleges, the prevailing sensation I feel is that of being a mutt at a pedigree dog show, praying my little paws off that the judges don't realize how unqualified I am. I endure their pokes, their prods—even when they lift up my tail and start checking parts of my anatomy I really wish they wouldn't. Gritting my teeth, I bear it, for the sake of admittance to the college of my choice.

In reality, the process is slightly less degrading than the scene described. Admission officers are generally polite, responsive to questions and concerns and only rarely rub your ears when you sit. Throughout interviews, visits and the writing of essays, I have managed to uphold, at least, the façade of grace.

Succumbing to a fit of madness I may never understand, I decided several years ago that I would work towards applying to Ivy League schools. I have always been a highly motivated, hard worker; but these recent years have nearly put me over the edge. Now, regrettably, I know what it feels like to study every night for days before a test, and get a D on it anyway (thank you, AP physics). I know what it feels like to not sleep for more than six hours total over the course of an entire week. I know why coffee is a necessary commodity in dorms across the nation.

Throughout all of this, day after day I found my mailbox filled with glossy brochures attempting, with varying levels of sincerity, to entice me into attending one school or another. For a long time, I vowed to give every college a chance, and I didn't throw away a single piece of mail. Piles grew all around my room and, finally, I had to start making some choices.

For instance, one of my first decisions was that I would not flourish in a big-city atmosphere. So, metropolitan campuses were out. Then, I determined that if I were to attend an all-female school, the overwhelming femininity would doubtlessly drive me to rip my hair out before the first month had passed. So, all-girl schools were out. It was those small decisions that, like playing "Clue," knocked down my list until it consisted of 20 schools.

Now, after all of this preparation, the time has come to actually finalize my list at 10 schools or fewer, and start to send in applications. I could hardly have done more to prepare, but somehow I still don't feel ready.

I remember nights when I stayed up for hours, wondering if I could have worked in time for an extra volunteer project, another activity, extra clubs, more studying, etcetera. Upon receiving transcripts in the mail, I meticulously looked over my standings, trying to figure out what else I could have done to be better.

As far as college admission is concerned, despite the standardized tests to which we're forced to submit, the lengthy applications required, and the general sucking-up demanded in the admission process, what I am learning is that the degradation I have experienced has been 100 percent self-inflicted. In the face of Ivy League expectations, I feel that I could never possibly be good enough, because I know that I'm not perfect.

In the end, I know that I will be happy. I have complete faith that no matter where I end up, college will be a full, enriching experience. All I need now is to calm down, and remember that at least legally I'm not an adult yet. It's okay to take a night off of studying for the SAT to enjoy a *Lord of the Rings* marathon with friends. The world will not come crashing down if I set down my required reading and pick up a pleasure-read instead. If I go for a bike ride instead of completing a certain piece of Spanish homework, I am not a complete failure.

College admission officers know that no one is perfect, as do I (except perhaps Edward Norton, but that's beside the point). As reasonable people, they have mostly reasonable expectations. All that we can do, as students, is be as honest with ourselves and our goals as we possibly can, and realize that if we don't get into a certain school, maybe it's for the best. Innumerable people before us have found their ways in the world—what's to say we can't do the same? All that's needed is to take this process one day at a time, and maintain a level head about the important things in your life.

So, lick yourself clean, and raise your tails high—let the inspections begin.